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SUBJECT: CONTROVERSIAL GENERAL NAMED HEAD OF RUSSIAN AIRBORNE
TROOPS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Strongly criticized for war crimes committed in Chechnya by troops under his command, Lt. General Vladimir Shamanov's appointment to command Russian airborne troops is considered by some experts to be a message from the Russian leadership in support of not only military reform but also of MOD Serduykov, at a time when rumors abound about his possible resignation. While Chechens criticized the appointment, Shamanov is considered an experienced and well-known military expert who will help advance reform from within the military. End Summary.

A Controversial General Appointed Airborne Commander

¶2. (SBU) On May 25, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that Lieutenant General Vladimir Shamanov would replace Lt. General Valeiy Yevtukhovich as commander of Russia's airborne troops. The airborne commander post had been vacant since the May 6th discharge of Yevtukhovich, who had reached the mandatory retirement age.

¶3. (SBU) Shamanov gained notoriety during the Chechen wars when troops under his command committed war crimes. Russian military analysts, if not human rights experts, differ on whether to label Shamanov a war criminal. Many analysts here continue to justify Shamanov's actions in the Caucasus as helping to bring under control a region of bandits "where the people understand only force." Experts agree that Shamanov is an effective general and now a key figure within the Russian military leadership who will help advance Serduykov's unpopular military reforms.

Chechen Reaction

¶4. (SBU) Officials in Chechnya have criticized Shamanov's appointment. Chechnya's Ombudsman for Human Rights Nurdi Nukhaziev stated on May 25 that no one in Chechnya has forgotten the violence Shamanov wrought on the local civilian population, nor have they forgotten his attempts to protect war criminals. (Note: In the year 2000, as Governor of the Ulyanovsk Oblast region, Shamanov publicly supported one of his former commanders, Colonel Yuri Budanov, during his trial over the kidnap and murder of a young Chechen woman, Elza Kungeva.)

What It Means for Military Reform

¶5. (SBU) Experts argued that Shamanov's designation is an indication that Russian political leaders have stopped thinking in terms of a global war that necessitates a mass mobilization of troops. They said that the August 2008 war with Georgia was a reminder that future conflicts involving Russia will most likely occur within or

near its borders. As a result, a smaller army consisting mainly of professional, effective, and readily deployable troops is needed. Shamanov, a seasoned fighter in conventional warfare and a notable figure within the public and military spheres, is considered the right person to help push forward such a reform.

¶6. (SBU) Respected and well-known within the military, Shamanov has publicly supported military reform. Some experts argue that his appointment thus serves as a message from the Russian leadership in support of not only military reform but also of MOD Serduykov, at a time when rumors abound about his possible resignation or transfer to another position (septel).

Appointment's Timing: Reneging on Tula Base Closure

¶7. (SBU) Shamanov's appointment coincides with the reversal of the Russian MOD's decision to disband the 106th airborne unit in Tula. According to press sources, the turn-around followed a number of letters and complaints to the MOD and the Presidency. However, local press reported that the decision was expected. Within the proposed military reform, airborne troops, along with Russia's strategic nuclear forces, will be a main component of Russia's mobile ground forces; thus significant reductions in the number of airborne troops are unlikely.

Biographic Note

¶8. (SBU) Shamanov had been in charge of the MOD's Main Directorate

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for Military Training since 2007. A recipient of the Hero of the Russian Federation decoration for his service in Chechnya, Shamanov was appointed in 2007 as advisor to then MOD Sergei Ivanov, and then co-chairman of the US-Russian Joint Commission on POW/MIA (USRJC). Considered a "hawk" among Russian military leaders, Shamanov's military career includes service with Russian Ground Forces in Pskov, Moldavia, Azerbaijan and Ulyanovsk. Shamanov graduated from the Ryazansk airborne command school in 1978.

¶9. (SBU) In March 1995 Shamanov was deployed to Chechnya to command a division of troops that took heavy combat losses. In October 1995 he was appointed deputy commander of Russian forces in Chechnya, and was then promoted to commander in April 1996. In April 1998 he was named commander of the 20th Army (Voronezh), and then in July 1999 he was appointed commander of the 58th Army based in Vladikavkaz, North Caucasus Military District. During this time he led the retaliatory attack against Chechen fighters in Dagestan and suppressed Wahhabism within the republic. In September 1999 Shamanov was appointed commander of federal forces in the North Caucasus. He is considered one of the most effective military leaders in both Chechen Wars.

BEYRLE